UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Toronto Saxophone Collective

Curated by Nolan Hildebrand

2025 University of Toronto New Music Festival
Reza Vali, Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition
Norbert Palej, *festival coordinator*

Saturday, January 25, 2025 at 2:30pm | Walter Hall, 80 Queen's Park

PROGRAM

A Sheep Afloat (2021)
Yike Zhang

Strength to Climb (2022)
Steven Banks

The last Sunset of August (2024)
Menelaos Peistikos

Orbit (2019)
Kotoka Suzuki

Drone, Wolf, Skronk (2022)
Nolan Hildebrand

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

As part of the Faculty's commitment to improving Indigenous inclusion, we call upon all members of our community to start/continue their personal journeys towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous peoples' histories, truths and cultures. Visit indigenous.utoronto.ca to learn more.

PROGRAM NOTES

A Sheep Afloat **(2021), Yike Zahn (12:45)**
A Sheep Afloat is a piece I wrote for saxophone octet in 2021. It was premiered by the University of Toronto Saxophone Ensemble, for which I was Composer in Residence that year. When writing this piece, I was influenced by the spectralist and post-spectralist works of Kajia Sarriaho and Georg Friedrich Haas, so the piece makes use of post-spectralist elements, such as quarter-tones, saxophone growl sound, free altissimo glissando, and multiphonics.

The piece mainly emphasizes a complex quarter-tone harmonic color and dense texture. However, at the climax section, I composed a contrast by using a simple homophonic texture, with pure melody and soft quarter-tone harmonic accompaniment. The melody comes from one of my favorite romantic Chinese folk songs, which has a weird lyric, “I’d like to be a little sheep, and stay with her all the time. I’d like her to wave a whip, gently beating me every day.” I transferred the bizarre little sheep metaphor to the title of the piece.

Strength to Climb **(2022), Steven Brinks (8:20)**
During the initial lockdown phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, I became an avid meditator. In my study of meditation, I have been reminded frequently of the concept of impermanence. Our lives, bodies, and communities are constantly changing. We often want to cling to things that we find pleasant and avoid that which is unpleasant. We know, of course, that these efforts are often unsuccessful. In meditation, I work to experience the vicissitudes of life in a non-judgemental way so I am not ruled by them in trying times. Maintaining awareness in each passing moment encourages us to respond wisely to all things that life throws at us.

In Strength to Climb, I explore my newfound awareness of the nature of how things rise, fall, and change in life. Sometimes change is abrupt. Other times, we experience a slow shift over time. We may also reach plateaus. Regardless, time marches on. In this piece, you will hear musical reflections on these different ways that life ebbs and flows.

While writing this piece, I was constantly studying the music of Ravel and Debussy. This work specifically references the second movement of Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit in a number of ways. The most notable of these references is the use a single-pitch motive that is present at all times. This anchor-like gesture evokes a sense of groundedness and serves as a reminder of the continuous flow of time.

You will hear the gospel song Lord Don't Move the Mountain (lyrics below) referenced throughout this work. I fell in love with this song from listening to recordings of Mahalia Jackson and Etta James. This song is a reminder to us that hardship is inevitable. We need not run from it. We just need to find the strength to continue climbing.

Lord Don't Move the Mountain

Lord, don't move the mountain
But give me the strength to climb
Lord, don't move my stumbling block
But lead me all around
Our cares we bring unto you
You told us, Lord, that we could
You promised to help those who help themself
And I believe that you'll have mercy, Lord

The way may not be easy
You didn't say, Lord, that it would be
For when our tribulations get too light
We tend to stray from Thee
Have mercy
Please don't move the mountain
Just give me the strength to climb
Lord, don't move my stumbling block
But lead your child all around

Strength to Climb is dedicated to my beloved teacher, Taimur Sullivan, to whom I owe so much.

***The last Sunset of August* (2024), Menelaos Peistikos (13:55)**
For all the crimson sunsets that you gifted to me
The sunsets from which I was born
The sunsets that made me a composer
You have become the Sun.
Your son

***Orbit* (2019), Kotoka Suzuki (8:35)**
(no program notes)

***Drone, Wolf, Skronk* (2022), Nolan Hildebrand (10:00)**
Drone, Wolf, Skronk is a maximalist work for saxophone ensemble with electronics that explores density, amplitude, physicality, and noise. When writing the work, I was inspired by various juxtaposing music, aesthetics, and ideas which are alluded to in the section titles of the piece

Drone – Full Drone: Instruments slowly build a massive clustery drone inspired by the music of Tony Conrad.

panning: Accented rhythms move laterally across the ensemble emphasizing the performer's spatialized stage layout.

HOWL*:* I connected the use of the wolf interval (a dissonant fifth interval using mean-tone temperament tuning systems) to wolves howling. To creates the melodic material for this section, I transcribed recordings of howling wolves and orchestrated it for the saxophone ensemble.

SKRONK!: *Skronk* is a slang word that refers to raw discordant sounds. This section was inspired by cacophonous and improvised sounds of saxophonists like Chris Pitsiokos and Peter Brötzmann

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Yike Zhang (b. 1993 in Wuhan, China) is a composer active in Toronto and New York. In 2024, Zhang received her Doctor of Music Arts degree from the University of Toronto, where she was composer in residence for the University of Toronto symphony orchestra. She also received degrees from the Manhattan School of Music (MM) and Wuhan Conservatory of Music (BM). Her music synthesizes the different worlds she was interested in from a young age — Western classical music and traditional Chinese concepts — organically combining those elements consciously and subconsciously. The fluidity and resonance that are the vitality of her music come from influences of impressionism and post-spectralism.

Menelaos Peistikos (22 August, 1995) is a Greek composer and pianist currently based in Toronto, Canada. His music is inspired by an extreme variety of musical genres, ranging from baroque and renaissance music to contemporary classical and cinematic music, as well as from folk Greek to Japanese, Tibetan and Indonesian Gamelan music. A very critical element in most of his compositions is his influence by other disciplines of Art (like fine art, literature, philosophy, poetry and photography) especially by the oeuvres of Plato, Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche, Alan Watts and Edward Hopper.

Kotoka Suzuki / 鈴木琴香 is a composer focusing on both multimedia and instrumental practices. She has produced several large-scale multimedia works, including spatial interactive audio-visual work for both concert and installation settings, often in collaboration with artists and scholars from other disciplines. Her work engages deeply in the visual, conceiving of sound as a physical form to be manipulated through the sculptural practice of composition. Her work often reflects on life, breath and wind.

Nolan Hildebrand is a composer and noise artist based in Toronto, Canada. Nolan's music explores conceptual and physical extremities to create intense and engaging music. His compositions span classical ensembles and electroacoustic music, and performance in an experimental solo noise project dubbed BLACK GALAXIE.

As a performer and composer, saxophonist **Steven Banks** (b. 1993) is striving to bring his instrument to the heart of the classical music world. He is driven to program and write music that directly addresses aspects of the human experience and is an active and intentional supporter of diverse voices in the future of concert music. Rick Perdian of Seen and Heard International has said "one senses that Banks has the potential to be one of the transformational musicians of the twenty-first century."